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THE USE OF PICTURES

IN THE

SCHOOLROOM.

(ILLUSTRATED.)

BY

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THE USE OF PICTURES IN THE SCHOOLROOM.*

The schoolroom was dingy, the day was dark and heavy, but the children, whom I remember well, turned the sunniest faces to greet me as I entered. The teacher, a gracious, high-minded woman, smiled at their eager requests to be allowed to tell me what they had been doing, and readily assented to them.

"We have been to see the pictures in Mr. Bray's gallery," they cried, almost in unison. "Miss Brown asked him, and he let us all in! You ought to see them!" Then the descriptions hurried pell-mell, in their eagerness to be first, and Miss Brown was obliged to interpose and choose the speakers.

Ragged, unkempt little fellows they were, whose homes were barren and unlovely, and whose wayward feet were used to all the streets and alleys of the crowded city. What would they—could they—care for a picture gallery?

Their eager interest left no doubt in my mind, as they described the treasures of the gallery. There were a hundred pictures, they said, but they liked some better than others. Best of all, they liked the picture of a mother, sitting by the fire and holding her baby "just so," they

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The Perry Pictures. From Painting by Raphael. 1483-1520.

SISTINE MADONNA.

said, folding their arms about an imaginary baby, and looking lovingly into its face. "You would know she loved the baby from the way she looked at it; and it looked so warm and pleasant in the room where she sat. But it wasn't a rich room,—it was a poor room,—yet it looked pleasant and happy."

"And then, you ought to see that other picture of the sheep out in the storm. It looked so dark and lonesome, and the sheep were all huddled together, and I shivered when I looked at it!"

I wish the artist might have heard that comment.

As I left the room, I wondered if the teacher knew how much she had done for those children. Into lives that were barren and shut in she had entered with her love of the beautiful, and had made it possible for the wealth which she enjoyed to be shared by the children.

"Why not?" she had said, very simply. "We are trying to teach our children to enjoy literature and music, and we are succeeding in our efforts. Why should they not learn to love good pictures as well?"

This incident happened years ago. Happily, the hope of that teacher was shared by many others, and to-day it is possible to make our children at home with good pictures, as well as with good books. It is no longer a rare thing to see the walls of the schoolroom hung with fine copies of the works of the masters. These unconsciously make their presence felt, as does a pure and gracious character, and the children, accustomed to the charm of such companionship, turn instinctively to beautiful things when they are enabled to choose for themselves.

But aside from the influence of the pictures upon the walls, much has been accomplished by the use of smaller reproductions, which fortunately have been placed within the reach of the lightest purse. No one can observe the common use of such pictures without rejoicing,—for these

The Perry Pictures.

THE ANGELUS.

From Painting by Millet. 1818-1875.

not only make their influence felt in the schoolroom, but they go out with the children into their homes, where they brighten the walls and multiply their teaching. I have visited schools where the Perry Pictures had been bought by the children, with money which otherwise would have been appropriated to pickles, gum, or candy. The teacher had placed some of the pictures about the walls of the room, and had allowed the children to choose "one apiece" to remain upon their desks during the day. She said the pupils hung over the pictures with delight, slowly making their choices, loth to leave any, when all seemed to them so attractive. After keeping their pictures all day upon their desks, they wrote about them. The proposition to buy them was their own. "We can save our own money," they said. And so their books were made, picture and composition alternating upon the pages. The children showed them with pride, and described their pictures with affection and discernment as well.

I remember with pleasure one school, where a class of third-grade children showed me their pictures, and told me about them. "This is the Angelus," one said; "Mr. Millet painted it,—Jean Francois Millet. He lived in France, and he loved to paint the peasants,—the poor people. This man and woman are out in the field, where they have been digging potatoes. You know that is hard work. You can see the rough field and the potato tops. There is a wheelbarrow, with sacks of potatoes in it. And you can see the man's heavy fork, stuck into the ground. Do you see the little church, far off in the distance? The Angelus bell is ringing, calling to prayer. They have stopped their work, and are lifting their hearts in prayer. They are all alone in the field, but they remember that God is with them. I am sure their work would be sad as well as heavy if it were not for the thought of Him."

The Perry Pictures. From Painting by Millet. 1818-1875.

THE SOWER.

The Perry Pictures. From Painting by Millet. 1818-1875.

THE GLEANERS.

The Perry Pictures. From Painting by Millet. 1818-1875.

FEEDING HER BIRDS.

The words were simple, her description broken, but no comment was made. The child felt the beauty of the picture, and had begun to spell out the artist's message.

"Feeding her Birds," another child said, was his favorite. "I don't know why Mr. Millet called it 'feeding her birds,' because the picture shows a mother sitting in a doorway of a cottage, feeding her children. She has a bowl in her lap, and holds a spoon in her hand. She feeds them by turns, and one child is holding her mouth ready for her spoonful now. The others look as if they were anxious for their turn. You can see hens eating about the yard, and behind the house the father is chopping wood. I like to see the mother taking care of her children. It makes you feel happy and comfortable. It is just the way the mother bird feeds her young. Miss Smith taught us to recite this: 'Behold the fowls of the air: they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.' This isn't a rich home, but don't you think it is a happy one?"

Others told of "The Gleaners," "The Churner," and "The Sower." I was not surprised afterward when the children recited "The Village Blacksmith," without note or comment on the part of the teacher.

In another class the teacher had placed before the pupils copies of Rosa Bonheur's paintings, and the children were talking about them. "You would know from the pictures that she loved animals, just to see the pictures," said one. "And she makes you love them, too," said another. "See how noble her lion looks! And you feel proud of her horses." Then the class fell to questioning about the Highland cattle, and the Scotch moors and hills. "She must have stayed with them to know how to paint them so well," one commented. "I wonder how she did it." The teacher replied to their questions, and by her comments awakened more.

The Perry Pictures.

From Painting by Millet. 1818-1875.

LABOR.

"How much more thoughtfully the children will question pictures after this," I thought.

Not long ago a seven-year-old girl came into my home, for a friendly visit. "Oh, you have Raphael's Sistine Madonna," said the child. "I am glad. I always liked that." My young friend lived in the country, and attended a village school. Her teacher had taught her about the picture, she said, and she had a little one of her own. I fancied the last named fact was one secret of her interest, and I again rejoiced in the thought that such possession could now become a common privilege.

"Beauty, which is the natural food of a healthy imagination, should be sought after by every one who wishes to achieve the great end of existence, that is, to make the most of himself. Cultivate admiration. It is by admiration only of what is beautiful and sublime that we can mount up a few steps toward the likeness of what we admire."

Shall we not, as teachers, rejoice in the common recognition of the most fruitful tendencies of such teaching, and do all in our power to open the eyes of our children, that they may behold the beautiful, and be inspired by beholding it? "Whatsoever things are lovely,—think on these things."

The Perry Pictures. From Painting by Herring. 1795-1865.

THE VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.

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